

## **Chapter 1 - Purpose and Need**

### **1.0. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. PROJECT AREA LOCATION**

### **1.2. PROPOSED ACTION**

### **1.3. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

### **1.4. PLANNING AND DIRECTION**

### **1.5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

### **1.6. ISSUES**

### **1.7. DECISIONS TO BE MADE**



### **1.0. INTRODUCTION**

The Forest Service has prepared this Final Environmental Impact Statement to disclose potential, effects of the proposed action and the alternatives to the proposed action within and surrounding the American and Crooked River project area in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. The project area is located within the Red River Ranger District on the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho. This Final Environmental Impact Statement discloses direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts and irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources that could result from implementation of the proposed action and alternatives.

This Final Environmental Impact Statement is prepared according to the format established by Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1500-1508). Chapter 1 explains the purpose and need for the proposed action, discusses how the American and Crooked River project relates to the 1987 Nez Perce Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), and identifies issues raised driving the development of alternatives. Chapter 2 identifies the significant issues driving the analysis of environmental effects, describes and compares the proposed action, alternatives to the proposed action, and a no-action alternative. It also compares the alternatives by summarizing their environmental consequences. Chapter 3 describes the natural and human environments potentially affected by the proposed action and alternatives, and discloses potential environmental effects. Chapter 4 contains the list of preparers, followed by the Final Environmental Impact Statement distribution list, appendices (including literature cited and glossary). The Appendices provide additional information on specific aspects of the proposed project and alternatives. This Final Environmental Impact Statement incorporates documented analyses by summarizing and referencing them where appropriate.

The interdisciplinary team made up of Forest Service resource specialists used a systematic approach for analyzing the proposed project and alternatives to it, estimating the environmental effects, and preparing this Final Environmental Impact Statement. The planning process complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the CEQ regulations. Planning was coordinated with the appropriate Federal, State, local agencies, and tribes.

## **1.1. PROJECT AREA LOCATION**

American River and Crooked River are two large watersheds in the upper South Fork Clearwater River subbasin. The watersheds encompass approximately 59,000 acres and 45,000 acres, respectively.

The project area is located in two separate areas within the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho County. Portions of the American and Crooked River watersheds are contained in the project area boundary and are located in the Clearwater Mountains of the Rocky Mountain physiographic province. The American River watershed is located north and northeast of Elk City, while the Crooked River watershed is located west and southwest of Elk City. The project area, which encompasses approximately 39,000 acres, lies north and east of the town of Orogrande and includes National Forest System lands around the Elk City Township.

## **1.2. PROPOSED ACTION**

The Red River District Ranger proposes to implement fuel reduction activities and a range of watershed improvement activities, likely to begin in the fall of 2005. This project is proposing to harvest or otherwise treat timber stands of dead, dying, or downed trees and trees at risk of mountain pine beetle attack (primarily lodgepole pine). Proposed harvesting and associated treatments, including road treatments, would be conducted in portions of the American and Crooked River watersheds within the American and Crooked River project area on the Red River Ranger District of the Nez Perce National Forest, Idaho County, Idaho. Completion of these activities would move the project area towards a Desired Future Condition as defined in the Nez Perce National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan – USDA FS, 1987a). A description of the treatments follows below and in more detail in Chapter 2 - Alternatives Including the Proposed Action.

## **1.3. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The purpose of the project is to reduce existing and potential forest fuels, create conditions that will contribute to sustaining long-lived fire tolerant tree species (ponderosa pine, western larch) and contribute to the economic and social well-being of people who use, and reside, within the local area.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on public response to the DEIS, clarification of the economic and social well-being portion of the Purpose and Need Statement is provided. Evaluation of alternatives considered a combination of factors that help define economic and social well-being including:

- Protection of property and infrastructure from potential wildfire effects.
- Economic opportunities.
- Public use and enjoyment of the area associated primarily with:
  - Recreation opportunities.
  - Fish and wildlife habitat.
  - Water Quality.

The Forest Plan provides direction for the management of the American and Crooked River project area and the desired future condition. The purpose and need for this project was determined after comparing the desired future condition and the existing condition of the American and Crooked River project area. The area's existing condition was determined using field data and the findings and recommendations from the South Fork Clearwater River Landscape Assessment (USDA FS, 1998a). The South Fork Clearwater River Landscape Assessment is not a decision document. This analysis addresses only a few of the overall package of actions that were recommended in these documents.

The objectives of this project are to:

- Promote the health and vigor of timber stands and improve the environment for long-lived, fire resistant species by reducing densities of lodgepole pine or other small diameter trees that provide fuel ladders for development of crown fires,
- Increase relative proportions of long-lived, fire resistant tree species by restoring or regenerating to western larch, ponderosa pine, and by protecting large diameter ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and western larch,
- Reduce the risk of large-scale crown fire spread by creating vegetative patterns through harvest or silvicultural treatments, that would increase fire suppression and management effectiveness, and
- Reduce the likelihood of severe local fire effects by removing dead, dying, and downed trees that would otherwise result in high fuel loading.

### **CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

In portions of the project area, the forest vegetation is dominated by lodgepole pine that became established following wildfires that occurred in the early 1900s. Extensive stands of lodgepole pine are now mature (80 to 130 years old) and susceptible to bark beetle attack. Aerial surveys supporting the 2003 Zone Entomologist report for the Nez Perce National Forest indicate that mountain pine beetle infestations in the project area increased substantially between 1998 and 2002. Beetle activity is currently intense and expanding. This bark beetle activity is resulting in an expanding number of dead trees with the potential to carry a severe wildfire over a wide area as these trees fall and accumulate as dry fuel over the next 10 to 20 years.

Over the past 50 years, Forest vegetation conditions within the analysis area have developed under limited fire occurrence. Shade-tolerant trees (for example, grand fir, Douglas-fir, and sub alpine fir, in addition to lodgepole pine) have become established underneath many of the forest stands resulting in multi-aged stand conditions creating a situation known as a "fuel ladder." Given favorable weather and fuel moisture conditions, a ground fire could move into the crowns in many of these areas and result in large intense wildfires.

The proximity of this forest fuels buildup to Elk City as well as private inholdings, residences, and government facilities within the two watersheds heightens concerns for public safety and potential property damage if a large wildfire were to occur. A wildfire in the project area, under the developing fuel conditions, would be expected to have a high potential for adverse effects on natural resources as well. If the heavy fuel accumulations were to burn under extreme conditions, the large number of roads in the project area would tend to exacerbate an increase in run-off and associated sedimentation from the burned area during post-fire precipitation events.

### **DISCUSSION OF VEGETATION TREATMENTS**

Vegetation treatment activities, described previously, would be implemented in patterns to achieve landscape objectives. These treatments would meet a multitude of integrated, compatible objectives. They would reduce fuel continuity, vertically and laterally, and promote the regeneration and

perpetuation of more fire resistant species. Treatments would be compatible with restoring diversity of patch size, internal stand diversity, and riparian habitat objectives associated with the Forest Plan standards.

Activities under this proposal would be designed with provisions to mitigate and minimize the risk of noxious weeds and undesirable non-native plants that are expanding into previously unoccupied areas of the forest and, where feasible, to reduce existing weed populations.

Activities along Road 233 (Orogrande Road) and other primary routes that service residential and recreational areas would be designed to improve road maintenance effectiveness, create or maintain conditions to facilitate a safe and orderly evacuation in case of emergency, and compliment strategic fuel management objectives by reducing dead, dying, and defective trees as necessary.

To facilitate treatments and mitigate, reduce, or offset the potential effects of the proposed actions, a series of watershed improvement projects and activities would be developed to meet Forest Plan standards. These activities would maintain or improve aquatic conditions in the sub-watersheds in the project area. Watershed improvement activities would include the following:

- reclaiming abandoned mine sites,
- restoring soils and riparian areas damaged by past activities,
- improving instream fish habitat, and
- establishing trees and other vegetation for stream shade.

Logging systems and fuels treatments would be dictated by topography, economics, and the need to protect residual stands. Logging systems would range from ground-based with hand felling or mechanized felling, to cable systems with hand felling.

Fuels reduction treatments would be designed to favor desired tree species to be regenerated or protected. Treatment methods include whole tree yarding, mechanized piling of slash concentrations, hand piling in selected areas, and broadcast burning in openings (with fire lines constructed to contain prescribed fire while protecting reserve tree groups or single trees).

This proposal would **not** treat or directly modify timber stands validated as existing old growth that currently meet the definition of “old growth” under the Old-Growth Forest Types of the Northern Region - USDA Forest Service, R-1 SES 4/92, and the Nez Perce National Forest Plan.

This proposal would **not** mechanically treat vegetation or construct roads in existing inventoried roadless areas.

**No** new permanent roads would be constructed under this proposal.

## **1.4. PLANNING AND DIRECTION**

### **REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

Development of this analysis is based on direction found in the:

- National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and implementing regulations at 36 CFR 219;
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality and implementing regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508;
- National Historic Preservation Act and implementing regulations at 36 CFR 800;
- Clean Water Act (Federal Water Pollution Control Act) and implementing regulations at 40 CFR 130; and

- Endangered Species Action and implementing regulations at 50 CFR 402.06 and 40 CFR 1502.25.

Other applicable federal laws and executive orders pertaining to project-specific planning and environmental analysis on federal lands include the:

- Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960,
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (as amended),
- Clean Air Act of 1970 (as amended),
- Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974 (as amended),
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978,
- Archeological Resource Protection Act of 1979,
- Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988,
- Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1996,
- Executive Order 11593 (cultural resources), Executive Order 11988 (floodplains), Executive Order 11990 (wetlands),
- Executive Order 12898 (environmental justice), and
- Executive Order 12962 (aquatic systems and recreational fisheries).

While most pertain to all federal lands, some of the applicable laws are specific to Idaho, and include:

- Idaho State Water Quality Standards,
- Idaho Forest Practices Act,
- Idaho Stream Channel Protection Act, and
- National Historic Reservation Act, 1966.

Disclosures and findings required by these laws and orders are contained in Chapter 3 of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the individual resource areas under the regulatory framework heading.

### **TIERING AND INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE**

This analysis tiers to the Nez Perce Forest Plan Final EIS (USDA FS, 1987a, 1987c) and amendments; and incorporates information from the Integrated Scientific Assessment for Ecosystem Management in the Interior Columbia River Basins and Portions of the Klamath and Great Basins (Quigley, *et al.* 1996) and the South Fork Clearwater Landscape Assessment (USDA FS, 1998a).

### **NEZ PERCE NATIONAL FOREST PLAN AS AMENDED**

This action responds to goals and objectives of the Nez Perce Forest Plan, and helps move the project area toward desired future conditions described in that plan. The Forest Plan includes forest-wide goals and objectives, and area-specific (land use designation) goals, objectives, and desired future conditions. The desired condition for the American and Crooked River project area is to have the forest components within their historic ranges of variability, restore natural disturbance processes where feasible, and mimic their effects in other places. Achieving this would ensure that ecologic processes function more naturally and maintain a resilient ecosystem within the area. Amendment number 20 of the Forest Plan has added additional management direction as it relates to fisheries and watershed management

## **FOREST PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

National forest management must be consistent with forest plans prepared under authority of the NFMA [16 U.S.C. 1604 and 36 CFR 219.10]. Forest Plan implementation includes the identification and scheduling of resource activities (site-specific projects) that meet the direction provided by the Forest Plan. These resource activities are necessary to meet the desired future condition defined in the Forest Plan.

The desired future conditions described for in the Forest Plan in Chapter 2 as land use designations, in conjunction with the other Forest Plan direction outlined above, provide the parameters for identifying and defining project-specific desired future conditions. The following desired future conditions will help guide management of the project consistent with the Forest Plan, the significant issues (described below), and the ecological conditions of the American and Crooked River project area.

- Resource outputs will have been provided to help support the economic structure of local communities (USDA FS, 1987a - II-1, Goal 1).
- Habitat will have been provided to contribute to the recovery of Threatened and Endangered plant and animal species in accordance with approved recovery plans and habitat will have been provided to ensure the viability of those species identified as sensitive (USDA FS, 1987a - II-1, Goal 4).
- The intrinsic ecological and economic value of wildlife and wildlife habitats will have been recognized and promoted. A high quality and quantity of wildlife habitat will have been provided to ensure diversified recreational use and public satisfaction (USDA FS, 1987a - II-1, Goal 6).
- Air quality will have been maintained (Forest Plan II-1, Goal 10).
- Significant historic properties will have been located, protected, and interpreted (USDA FS, 1987a - II-1, Goal 11).
- A stable and cost-efficient transportation system will have been provided through construction, reconstruction, maintenance, or transportation system management (USDA FS, 1987a - II-1, Goal 12).
- Resource values will have been protected through cost-effective fire and fuels management, emphasizing fuel treatment through the utilization of material and using prescribed fire (USDA FS, 1987a - II-2, Goal 13).
- Soil productivity will have been maintained and any irreversible impacts to the soil resource will have been minimized (USDA FS, 1987a - II-2, Goal 18).
- Stream channel stability and favorable conditions for water flow will have been maintained or enhanced (USDA FS, 1987a - II-2, Goal 20).

## **MANAGEMENT AREAS**

The Forest Plan defines management area goals and standards that guide resource activities to achieve the resource objectives for each management area and the Forest. The management area objectives in the Forest Plan (FP) provide framework for site-specific project planning and implementation. The Forest Plan contains 26 Forest-wide Management Areas (USDA FS, 1987a - pp 3-1 through 3-67). Seven are represented in the American and Crooked River project area (Table 1-1). Management areas are not discretely mapped. Forest Plan Management Area maps only indicate predominate conditions.



### **MANAGEMENT AREA 1 (EMPHASIS: MINIMUM MANAGEMENT)**

Vegetation and habitats typical of this management area are non-forest and low productivity forestlands that occur as small dispersed parcels, such as rock outcrops, scree, or areas of shallow soils along canyons and major drainages. The goal for Management Area 1 (MA1) is to present the minimum management necessary to provide for resource protection and to ensure public safety by controlling insects, disease, and noxious weed infestation. Road construction/reconstruction and trail reconstruction /maintenance are permissible if deemed necessary to meet the multiple use and management area objectives on adjacent lands (USDA FS, 1987a - III-5). No harvest is proposed on these types of lands. Restoration type activities could occur as part of the proposed action, which would be consistent with MA1 goals.

### **MANAGEMENT AREA 10 (EMPHASIS: TIMBER/RIPARIAN)**

Vegetation and habitats of this area consist of lakes, lakeside lands, perennial streams, seasonally flowing streams supporting riparian vegetation, and adjoining lands that are dominated by riparian vegetation. The goal of Management Area 10 (MA10) is to:

- Manage riparian areas to maintain and enhance their value for wildlife, fishery and aquatic habitat, and water quality;
- Manage timber, grazing, and recreation to give preferential consideration to riparian-dependent species on that portion of the management area “suitable” for timber management, grazing, or recreation (USDA FS, 1987a - III-30).

No harvest is proposed on these types of lands. Restoration type activities could occur in the proposed action, which would be consistent with MA10 goals.

### **MANAGEMENT AREA 12 (EMPHASIS: TIMBER)**

Vegetation on this type of area consists primarily of forested lands. The goal for Management Area 12 (MA12) is to:

- Manage for timber and other multiple uses on a sustained yield basis;
- Manage for roaded natural recreation (USDA FS, 1987a - III-37).

Harvest is proposed on this type of land and is consistent with MA12 goals.

### **MANAGEMENT AREA 16 (EMPHASIS: TIMBER/ELK WINTER RANGE)**

Management Area 16 (MA16) is described as those lands that provide winter habitat for deer and elk. The goal for MA16 is to improve the quality of the winter range habitat for deer and elk through timber harvesting, prescribed burning and other management practices (USDA FS, 1987a - III-46). Harvest is proposed on this type of land and is consistent with MA16 goals.

### **MANAGEMENT AREA 17 (EMPHASIS: VISUALS)**

Management Area 17 (MA17) consists of lands that have a high to medium degree of visual sensitivity. The goal is to manage for timber production within the constraints imposed by the visual quality objectives (VQOs) of retention or partial retention while providing for other multiple uses and resources. Roads will maintain adjacent vegetation for screening although vistas may be created where appropriate (USDA FS, 1987a - III-49). Harvest is proposed on this type of land in a manner that is consistent with MA17 goals.

### **MANAGEMENT AREA 20 (EMPHASIS: OLD GROWTH)**

At least half of the area described by the designation of Management Area 20 (MA20) consists of overmature saw-timber (150 years or older). The remainder of the area is comprised of immature stands (40-80 years) that will provide for replacement old-growth habitat. The goal of MA20 is to

provide “suitable” habitat (existing and replacement) for old-growth-dependent wildlife species (USDA FS, 1987a - III-56). No harvest is proposed on these types of lands, only restoration type activities (such as road decommissioning) would occur in areas with this designation. These activities are consistent with MA 20 goals.

### **MANAGEMENT AREA 21 (EMPHASIS: MOOSE WINTER RANGE)**

Management Area 21 (MA21) is described as timber stands that are old-growth grand fir-Pacific Yew vegetative communities identified as moose winter range. The goal for MA21 is to manage the grand fir-Pacific yew plant communities to provide for a continuing presence of Pacific yew “suitable” for moose winter habitat. Harvest units are to maintain at least 50 percent of the Pacific Yew components scattered throughout the unit in patches  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre in size (USDA FS, 1987a - III-58). Harvest is proposed on this type of land, but it will be consistent with the goals of MA21. Less than 50 acres is proposed for harvest as part of this project and harvest acres will be in small, scattered parcels that will maintain at least 50 percent of the Pacific Yew components.

### **INTERIOR COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN SCIENCE ASSESSMENT AND THE SOUTH FORK CLEARWATER LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT**

The Interior Columbia River Basin (ICRB) Science Assessment (Quigley, *et al.* 1996) documented the health of the Upper Columbia River Basin, but did not provide instructions for managing national forest lands. The report was considered the first step in the development of a scientifically sound, ecosystem-based management strategy for Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management administered lands within the Basin.

Nez Perce NF personnel considered the findings from the ICRB Science Assessment and incorporated them in the South Fork Landscape Assessment (SFLA) where appropriate. The SFLA (USDA FS, 1998a) characterized the ecological and social conditions in the South Fork Clearwater Subbasin. This midscale-level assessment, completed in March of 1998, provides context for forest management decisions in the South Fork Clearwater subbasin. The findings and recommendations for the American and Crooked River watersheds were reviewed and applied, where appropriate, in preparation of this EIS.

## **1.5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

### **SCOPING**

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) defines scoping as “...an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action” (40 CFR 1501.7). Among other things, the scoping process is used to invite public participation to help identify public issues and obtain public input at various stages of the EIS development process. Although scoping is to begin early, it is an ongoing process and continues until a decision has been made. In addition to the following specific activities, the American and Crooked River project has been listed since July 2003, on the Nez Perce National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions, which was mailed to approximately 470 groups and/or individuals. This information is also available on the Internet at [www.fs.fed.us/r1/nezperce](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/nezperce).

Chapter 2 outlines the public scoping process that led to the identification of significant issues and development of alternatives to the proposed action. The issues are described in this chapter. Information on other concerns raised during scoping is included in the project file.

To date, the public has been invited to participate in the project in the following ways:



## **LOCAL NEWS MEDIA**

Announcements about the project were sent to the Lewiston Morning Tribune and Idaho County Free Press via a news release on September 17, 2003, and information about the project was subsequently published in both papers. On August 2, 2003, a public discussion was held at Orogrande to provide project area information, present the proposed action, and discuss local concerns and interests that should be addressed in the project analysis. Legal notices were published in the Lewiston Morning Tribune on June 8, 2004, and in the Idaho County Free Press on June 9, announcing the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

## **PUBLIC FIELD TRIP**

A public fieldtrip was held on August 28, 2003, to provide project area information, present the proposed action, and discuss local concerns and interests that should be addressed in the project analysis.

## **PUBLIC MAILINGS**

On September 15, 2003, a scoping letter providing information and seeking public comment was mailed to approximately 30 individuals and groups that had previously shown interest in Forest Service projects on the Nez Perce National Forest. This included Federal and State agencies, the Nez Perce Tribe, municipal offices, businesses, interest groups, and individuals. The Forest Service received 20 responses to this mailing. On June 8, 2004 the DEIS was mailed to individuals and organizations that had provided scoping comments or requested a copy of the document.

## **NOTICE OF INTENT (NOI)**

A Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on September 25, 2003, when the Forest Service decided to prepare an EIS for the project.

## **NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY (NOA)**

A Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on June 10, 2004, when the Forest Service released the Draft EIS to the Public.

## **1.6. ISSUES**

Issues are disagreements or debates about the potential environmental impacts of a proposed action. As such, issues influence the design and evaluation of alternatives to the proposed action. Issues for the American and Crooked River project have been identified through the public scoping process.

Issues can be categorized as either non-significant or significant. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations guide Federal agencies in handling non-significant issues by directing them to "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." (40 CFR Part 1501.7). Non-significant issues are those that are:

- (1) Already addressed by law, regulation, forest plan or other higher level decision;
- (2) Beyond the scope of the purpose and need described in the Notice of Intent;
- (3) Not connected to the proposed action;
- (4) Conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence; or
- (5) Irrelevant to the decision to be made.

A list of non-significant issues and reasons for their categorization as non-significant may be found in the project record at the Forest Supervisors Office in Grangeville, Idaho.

Significant issues are used to develop alternatives to the proposed action (Chapter 2 - Alternatives Including the Proposed Action). They can also be addressed by standards and guidelines, mitigation measures, or design features common to all alternatives. In addition, significant issues provide the basis for the analysis of environmental effects (Chapter 3).

Issues for the American and Crooked River project were derived from a variety of sources, including those mentioned above in “Scoping.” Similar issues were combined into one statement where appropriate. The following issues were determined to be significant and within the scope of the project decision. They are presented in an Issue/Discussion format and reflect positions and values related to the project objectives, possible alternatives to consider, and environmental consequences that could result from a course of action.

Many commenters discussed specific activities that were beyond the scope or outside the purpose and need of this project. These activities that are reasonably foreseeable activities in the project and surrounding areas would be analyzed separately, and many actions may occur in the area within a 10-year time frame that are not analyzed because they are not completely formulated at this time.

## **HAZARDOUS FUELS MANAGEMENT**

**Issue:** Fire historically played a critical role in shaping and maintaining healthy, resilient, and productive forest stands in and around the project area. Fire exclusion over the past century interrupted the role of fire and has contributed to development of stand structure and composition that are trending toward conditions that would result in large-scale crown fires. Today, many forest stands in the project area are becoming stocked with small trees and have high levels of dead fuels; conditions that would result in higher fire intensities in the event of a wildfire. High intensity wildfire can result in severely burned areas that are outside historic norms and pose significant risks to human life and property. There is disagreement over whether existing fuels levels in the project area warrant treatment. Some believe that fuel loadings have reached hazardous levels and should be treated, while others believe fuels treatments are not needed at this time. Among those who feel treatments are needed, there is disagreement over methods to use, the priorities for treatment, and in what kinds of ecosystems to allow treatments.

Several differing views related to fire and fuels management were identified through public involvement and scoping. Some support actively managing vegetation and fuels in the American and Crooked River project area. Others raise concerns that the project as proposed will not reduce the potential for substantial adverse effects from a large wildfire in the area. They believe that the proposed project will not treat enough area (4-8 percent of the total project area) to effectively reduce the spread of a potential wildfire. They are also concerned that treatments will be ineffective and not remove enough fuels to reduce the potential for crown fires. Another concern is that dead, dying, leaning, and overcrowded trees pose a threat to evacuation along the Crooked River Road in the event of a wildfire near the Elk City Township. Many feel that, while the American and Crooked River project will provide some protection from a wildfire being carried into the Township, it will only have minimal effect on crown fire spread and fire severity. Some believe that landscape scale fire modeling should be used to analyze effects of the proposed treatments, including fire history and past, present, and post fuel treatment conditions.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Scoping uncovered a broad range of disagreement regarding how many acres should be treated and what types of trees<sup>1</sup> should be removed to meet objectives for reducing the risk of large-scale crown fire spread. Many indicated that insufficient area would be treated by the proposed action, while others stated that the individual treatment prescriptions are not intense enough to accomplish objectives for reducing wildfire spread.

One view is that prescribed fire should be used as the primary method to reduce fire hazard. Another view is that a variety of methods should be used, including mechanical methods such as timber harvest, brush removal, and small tree thinning (biomass removal). These views are related to the scientific debate over whether fire surrogates<sup>2</sup> can be used to effectively maintain and restore desired ecosystem conditions and functions.

Many agreed with the extent of the overall project area as proposed. Some favored establishment of a network of “defensible fuel treatment areas,” while others emphasized fuels reduction around human developments (wildland urban interface areas or the WUI). Proposals were also made to apply intense fire hazard reduction treatments in areas of high risk to humans, along with more natural burning in remote areas.

## **WATER QUALITY AND FISH HABITAT**

**Issue:** There is concern about the potential for the project to result in early, increased water yields. One view is that management activities in riparian ecosystems have the potential to degrade riparian and aquatic health. Another view is that management activities can be used to maintain or improve riparian and aquatic health, and that the proposed activities will not negatively impact fish populations or water quality. Many believe that assessing cumulative impacts on water quality, quantity, temperature, and timing of flows will be critical to informing the decision maker and public. Many support watershed improvement activities to improve existing aquatic conditions and help mitigate potential adverse impacts on water quality and fish habitat from activities on non-national forest lands. Some were interested in the development of a restoration only alternative.

**Discussion:** Conflicts between the management of lands and uses of natural resources in riparian and aquatic ecosystems have been a focus of public interest and scrutiny. The comments received during scoping indicate disagreement about levels of concern. Water quality and fish habitat issues are addressed in the Nez Perce National Forest Plan (USDA FS, 1987a) and through federal and state laws, rules, and regulations. Commenters suggest that these requirements be maintained in project design and project implementation. Examples include, but are not limited to, adherence to PACFISH and TMDL guidelines, rules, and regulations.

## **1.7. DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

Within the regulatory framework consisting of all applicable laws, regulations, and policies, this decision will include:

- The location, design, amount, and scheduling of hazardous fuel treatments, timber harvest, activity fuels treatment (slash), temporary road construction, road reconstruction, log-transfer facilities, and silvicultural practices;

---

<sup>1</sup> Dead and dying lodgepole pine, green lodgepole pine highly susceptible to mountain pine beetle attack, and/or green ponderosa pine and western larch.

<sup>2</sup> Mechanical treatments designed to create desired vegetation structures.

- The estimated timber volume, if any, to make available from the project area at this time;
- Access management measures necessary to meet Forest Plan standards and project objectives;
- The amount, location, and type of water quality/fish habitat restoration that needs to occur in conjunction with other management action;
- Appropriate design criteria, mitigation, and monitoring; and
- Scheduling of activities, if necessary, to meet the purpose and need of the action.